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Phonics ... Learning to Read and All That Stuff

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PHONICS . . . LEARNING TO READ AND ALL THAT STUFF

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(Editor's note—Dr. J. Lloyd Eldredge, Coordinator of Elementary Education for the State of Utah, recently presented a week-long conference for the Reading Institute at Western Michigan University. *Horizons* is pleased to publish the following article by Dr. Eldredge, who is well known for his work with learning cycles.)

In May of 1975, a representative sample of Utah students in grades six, nine, and eleven were tested to obtain answers to the following questions related to the state objectives:

1. To what extent can the students in Utah's schools identify words they don't initially recognize in print? (Word Attack Skills Components)
2. To what extent can the students in Utah's schools decode and comprehend written messages at the literal, interpretive, analytical, and critical reading levels? (Comprehension Components)
3. To what extent can the students in Utah's schools use the tools of reading to function; i.e. locate and understand information? (Study Skills Components)
4. To what extent do the students in Utah's schools enjoy reading? (Affective Components)

The reading committee organized to give direction to the reading status study identified forty objectives (learner behaviors) that they considered valid indicators for questions one, two, and three from a bank of reading objectives developed by the Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE) at the University of California, Los Angeles. The center is one of eight educational research and development centers sponsored by the U.S. Office of Health, Education, and Welfare. Established at UCLA in 1966 under the provisions of the Cooperative Research Act, the center is devoted exclusively to the area of educational evaluation. The publication rights to SOBAR (System for Objective-Based Assessment-Reading) were purchased from the center by SRA (Science Research Associates).

From the forty objectives selected, test items were generated to produce the custom-made objective-referenced tests used in the study. The objectives and corresponding test items were extensively reviewed by CSE and SRA professional staff, by teachers, by curriculum specialists, and by testing experts for clarity, brevity, validity, and completeness, as well as for freedom from racial and sexual bias.

Three test items were used to measure mastery of each objective. If a student answered all three of the items correctly, it was presumed that the objective had been mastered by that student. If the student answered fewer

than three items correctly, it was presumed that the learning objective had not been mastered. An essential feature of this approach is that the probability of attaining a mastery score by chance is low (.016 or 1.6 per cent).

SOBAR TEST RESULTS

There were 1,931 sixth grade students tested. On the average, these students mastered 25% of the reading objectives (10 out of 40). There were 871 ninth grade students and 770 eleventh grade students tested. On the average, these students mastered 37% of the objectives (15 out of 40). The objectives tested are listed on the next page.

Objectives *

1. Given a word orally that contains a short vowel sound, the learner will identify a written word that contains the same vowel sound.
2. Given a word orally that contains a dipthong sound, the learner will identify a written word that contains the same dipthong sound.
3. Given a word orally that contains a controlled vowel sound, the learner will identify a written word that contains the same vowel sound.
4. Given a written word, the learner will identify its syllabication.
5. Given a written word, the learner will identify its primary accented syllable.
6. Given a list of words, the learner will identify the word that has a prefix.
7. Given a list of words, the learner will identify the word that has a suffix.
8. Given a homograph in the context of a sentence, the learner will identify its meaning.
9. Given a sentence with a homograph that has different pronunciations, the learner will identify the appropriate pronunciation.
10. The learner will identify an example of non-literal language in a passage.
11. The learner will identify a specified figure of speech in a passage.
12. The learner will identify a paraphrase of a given sentence.
13. The learner will identify the main idea of a passage in which the main idea is explicit.
14. Given a passage and a question about a significant detail explicitly stated in the passage, the learner will identify the answer to the question.
15. The learner will identify the proper sequence of the main events in a passage.
16. The learner will identify the proper sequence of the major concepts in a passage.
17. The learner will identify the main idea of a passage where the main idea must be inferred.
18. The learner will identify a title for a passage where the main idea must be inferred.

19. Given a passage and a question about an event, action, or statement where the answer must be inferred from the passage, the learner will identify the answer to the question.
20. Given a passage in which the author's conclusions are implied, the learner will identify the conclusions.
21. The learner will identify statements of fact or opinion.
22. Given several passages offering different points of view concerning the same issues, the learner will identify the differences in points of view.
23. The learner will identify the author's opinions in an article or editorial.
24. Given a statement such as an advertisement that contains a propaganda technique, the learner will identify the type of technique used.
25. Given a passage, the learner will identify evidence of illogical thinking such as inconsistencies in data, false assumptions, and fallacies.
26. Given a passage, the learner will identify how well the author substantiated his opinon with facts and references.
27. Given a word problem, the learner will identify if sufficient information is given to solve the problem.
28. The learner will identify the function of the table of contents and lists of illustrations or charts.
29. The learner will identify the function of the back matter in a booklet (appendix, bibliography, glossary, and index).
30. The learner will identify the function of learning aids within a text (headings, chapter summaries, and overviews).
31. The learner will identify which guides and sections can be found in a dictionary.
32. The learner will use sample dictionary entries to find a definition, synonym, or antonym, for a word.
33. The learner will use a sample dictionary entry to identify the pronunciation of an unfamiliar word.
34. The learner will identify the encyclopedia volume that contains information about a topic.
35. Given a sample library catalog card, the learner will identify the author, title, subject, and call number of the book.
36. Given a question and a list of specialized reference materials, the learner will identify the reference that would provide the answer to the question.
37. Given a topic or problem, the learner will identify an appropriate source of information on that topic or problem.
38. Given a graph, table, or diagram, the learner will identify the best summary of the information it provides.
39. The learner will identify the use of map symbols, keys, and other devices used in map reading.
40. The learner will identify the kinds of information an atlas contains.

The graphs on the last page show the percentage of students, by grade level, mastering each of the objectives.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The first question to be answered by the study was: TO WHAT EXTENT CAN THE STUDENTS IN UTAH'S SCHOOLS IDENTIFY WORDS THEY DON'T INITIALLY RECOGNIZE IN PRINT? This question was aimed at a major goal of reading instruction: "breaking the code" or reconstructing speech. Other questions in the study were aimed at the goals of comprehension, appreciation, and application.

Regardless of the reading programs used by teachers, there are only four tools (strategies) available to learners to help them decode words that are initially unfamiliar to them in print: (1) phonics skills, (2) structural analysis skills, (3) context clues, and (4) the dictionary. Objectives one through nine and thirty-three were selected by the committee because the behaviors specified in those objectives provided indicators of students' abilities to use these four tools. Objectives one, two, and three were selected as phonics indicators; objectives four, five, six, and seven were selected as structural analysis indicators; objective eight was selected as an indicator for contextual usage; and objectives nine and thirty-three were selected as indicators of dictionary usage.

In summary, the following conclusions were made:

(1) The students tested in all grade areas showed greater mastery of phonics objectives than any of the other objectives tested. It appears that the students in the state are learning their phonics skills. These skills are particularly helpful in identifying words of one syllable.

(2) Although the students are learning phonics skills, it appears that they are not learning, as well, certain attendance skills necessary for identifying words of more than one syllable.

(3) Most of the students tested have not mastered dictionary pronunciation skills.

The second question to be answered by the study was: TO WHAT EXTENT CAN THE STUDENTS IN UTAH'S SCHOOLS DECODE AND COMPREHEND WRITTEN MESSAGES AT THE LITERAL, INTERPRETIVE, ANALYTICAL, AND CRITICAL READING LEVELS. This question is aimed at the "heart" of reading—reading comprehension. Because the question is so critical, most of the objectives selected for the study dealt with reading comprehension.

The behaviors selected as indicators of *literal comprehension* were: 21, 12, 16, 15, 13, and 14. The objectives selected as indicators of *interpretive reading* were: 19, 20, and 11. Objective 24 deals with the identification of *propaganda techniques* and objectives 27, 26, 25, 22, 23, 18, 17, and 38 deal with *analytical reading*.

The following conclusions were made:

(1) The students tested showed greater mastery in word identification skills, generally speaking, than in reading comprehension. In other words, the students are doing least well in those areas that are at the very "heart" of reading.

(2) The students tested showed greater mastery of literaly reading skills

than interpretive and analytical reading skills. However, they did extremely poor in even the literal reading skills.

(3) There is an obvious need for schools to do a better job of helping students identify propaganda techniques that are essential to the development of critical reading skills.

(4) There is an obvious need for schools to provide instructional programs for students that will help them read and comprehend written messages at the literal, interpretive, analytical, and critical reading levels.

The third question to be answered by the study was: TO WHAT EXTENT CAN THE STUDENTS IN UTAH'S SCHOOLS USE THE TOOLS OF READING TO FUNCTION; i.e. LOCATE AND UNDERSTAND INFORMATION? This question is aimed at the functional component of a reading program. Objectives 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, and 40 were selected as indicators for this component.

The following conclusions were made:

(1) The findings of the study skills assessment indicates a basic need to improve instruction in the study skills area of reading in Utah. Students cannot be expected to pursue learning on their own if they do not possess the tools to enable them to do so.

(2) Students at all age levels did poorest when asked to make use of a card catalog and other critical reference materials. This seems to indicate a need to upgrade the instruction children are receiving in how to make use of the library as a resource for learning and enjoyment.

The fourth question to be answered by the study was: TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE STUDENTS IN UTAH'S SCHOOLS ENJOY READING?

To get an answer to this question, the Office of the Utah State Board of Education commissioned Dr. Al Wight to design instruments to measure reading attitudes. He did so, and in the Spring of 1974 these instruments were administered to students in the Granite School District for the purposes of testing reliability and validity. After this process was completed, the revised instruments were administered to the same students who took the objective-based tests.

For a long time teachers have suspected that a relationship existed between how a student felt about himself, the subject and his achievement in that subject. This study gave support to that premise. Correlations were drawn between the student's attitude and his achievement in reading as measured by the SOBAR test.

Below is a summary of the attitudinal correlation findings:

(1) There was a significant positive relationship at all grade levels tested between the student's perception that teachers like good readers and dislike poor readers and his/her score on SOBAR.

(2) At all grade levels tested, student's self-confidence related more to his achievement on SOBAR (.938) than any other affective component. (.969)

(3) There was a significant negative relationship at all grade levels tested

(.891) between a student's dislike of reading and his
(.851) achievement on SOBAR.

(4) There was a significant positive relationship at all levels tested between a student's *valuing* (commitment) and *enjoying* reading and his achievement on SOBAR. (.755)
(.447)

The data suggests that the students who perceived that they would be classified as a good reader by the teacher did well on the SOBAR test. Although correlations are not indication of a cause and effect relationship, it is interesting to speculate over the data. A theory has long been stated that students will achieve teacher expectations. The data supports the theory that a strong relationship exists between student perceived teacher expectations and student achievement.

Educators have long believed that a student's self-concept has an effect upon his achievement. The data here indicates that a strong relationship exists. It, in essence, says that a student who thinks well of himself can also produce academically.

Another long standing educational theory is that a student's attitude toward a subject has a strong bearing on his achievement in that subject. If a student liked a subject, he would do well. The data indicated that there is a strong relationship between attitude and achievement. Those who liked reading did well on the SOBAR, and those who did not like reading did poorly. Students who valued and enjoyed reading seemed to do better. Some intercorrelations would also suggest students may value reading and yet not achieve nor like reading. That is, the students value reading even though they may not like it.

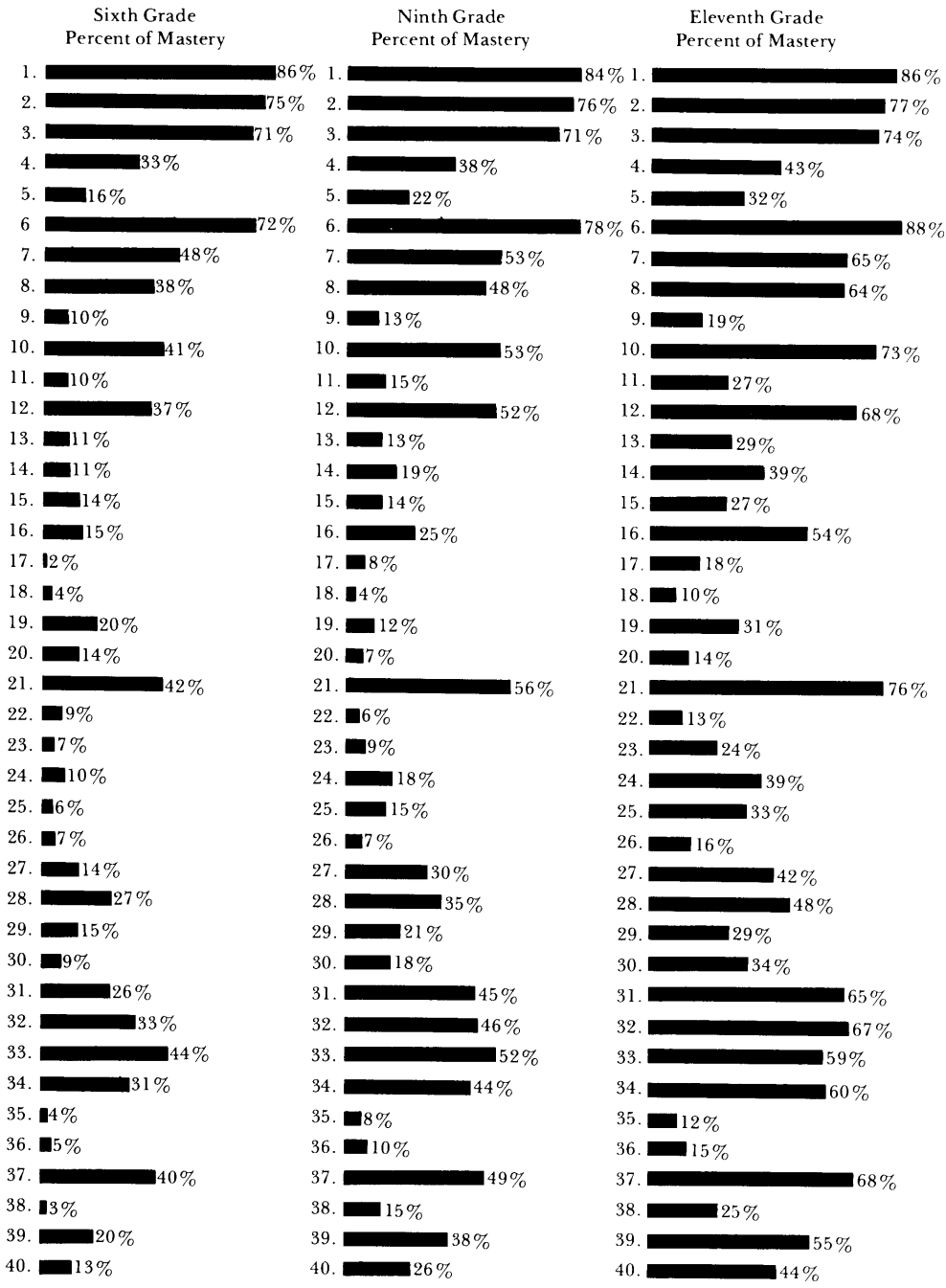
The data support long standing premises of education that:

(1) Teacher attitude toward a student as perceived as the student is related to his achievement.

(2) The student's self-concept is related to his achievement.

(3) The student's attitude toward a subject is related to his achievement in that subject.

*The objectives are copyrighted by Science Research Associates, Inc., Chicago, Illinois.


Sixth Grade
Percent of Mastery
1. 86%
2. 75%
3. 71%
4. 33%
5. 16%
6 72%
7. 48%
8. 38%
9. 10%
10. 41%
11. 10%
12. 37%
13. 11%
14. 11%
15. 14%
16. 15%
17. 2%
18. 4%
19. 20%
20. 14%
21. 42%
22. 9%
23. 7%
24. 10%
25. 6%
26. 7%
27. 14%
28. 27%
29. 15%
30. 9%
31. 26%
32. 33%
33. 44%
34. 31%
35. 4%
36. 5%
37. 40%
38. 3%
39. 20%
40. 13%
Ninth Grade
Percent of Mastery
1. 84%
2. 76%
3. 71%
4. 38%
5. 22%
6. 78%
7. 53%
8. 48%
9. 13%
10. 53%
11. 15%
12. 52%
13. 13%
14. 19%
15. 14%
16. 25%
17. 8%
18. 4%
19. 12%
20. 7%
21. 56%
22. 6%
23. 9%
24. 18%
25. 15%
26. 7%
27. 30%
28. 35%
29. 21%
30. 18%
31. 45%
32. 46%
33. 52%
34. 44%
35. 8%
36. 10%
37. 49%
38. 15%
39. 38%
40. 26%
Eleventh Grade
Percent of Mastery
1. 86%
2. 77%
3. 74%
4. 43%
5. 32%
6. 88%
7. 65%
8. 64%
9. 19%
10. 73%
11. 27%
12. 68%
13. 29%
14. 39%
15. 27%
16. 54%
17. 18%
18. 10%
19. 31%
20. 14%
21. 76%
22. 13%
23. 24%
24. 39%
25. 33%
26. 16%
27. 42%
28. 48%
29. 29%
30. 34%
31. 65%
32. 67%
33. 59%
34. 60%
35. 12%
36. 15%
37. 68%
38. 25%
39. 55%
40. 44%